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Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Letter dated 30 July 2012 from the Secretary-General to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 60/124, in which the Assembly established the Advisory Group for the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to advise me on its use and impact.

In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 21 of that resolution, I have the honour to transmit herewith a note of the meeting of the CERF Advisory Group, which took place in Geneva on 29 and 30 May 2012 (see annex).

As summarized in that note, the Advisory Group expressed appreciation for the continuing improvements in the performance and management of the Fund. The Group considered a number of policy issues, including the use of the 3 per cent programme support costs retained at Headquarters; progress made since the last meeting of the Advisory Group in implementing the management matrix in response to the five-year evaluation; the development by the CERF secretariat of a risk assessment matrix; and the Fund's performance and accountability framework.

The Group met resident/humanitarian coordinators from Chad, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Ethiopia to discuss their roles in coordinating the response of the humanitarian community to sudden onset disasters in their respective countries and, in particular, how they managed the funds disbursed by the Response Fund at the country level. The Advisory Group also met with members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to discuss the subgranting and the speed of onward disbursement of CERF funds from United Nations agencies and the International Organization for Migration to implementing partners.

I would be grateful if you would bring the present letter and its annex to the attention of the Member States and the observer missions.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon

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Annex

Note to the Secretary-General on the meeting of the Central Emergency Response Fund Advisory Group (29 and 30 May 2012)

Recommendations and conclusions

1. The Advisory Group of the Central Emergency Response Fund was established by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/124 to advise the Secretary-General, through the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, on the use and impact of the Fund. The Advisory Group's first meeting for 2012 was held in Geneva on 29 and 30 May, with 12 members participating. The Chair of the Advisory Group, Mikael Lindvall (Sweden), presided over the meeting.

2. The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator provided an update on the use and management of the Fund during the first five months of 2012. She also briefed the Group on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee transformative agenda. The Group met with the resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators from Chad, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Ethiopia to discuss their roles in coordinating the humanitarian community's response to sudden onset disasters and, in particular, how they managed CERF funds at the country level. The Group considered policy issues, including the level of programme support costs taken by recipient agencies and implementing partners, funding for internally displaced people and refugees in chronic conflicts, the quality of reporting by resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators, the development by the secretariat of the Fund of a risk assessment matrix, the CERF performance and accountability framework, and current partnerships with the evaluation departments of recipient agencies. In accordance with past practice, the Advisory Group met with partners from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. The meeting with the Standing Committee focused, inter alia, on the subgranting and the speed of onward disbursement of funds from United Nations agencies and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to implementing partners.

3. Further to those discussions, the Group would like to offer the following findings and recommendations.

Management

4. The Advisory Group expressed its appreciation to the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the CERF secretariat for the use of the funding over the preceding period, especially in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, and for the continued professional management of the Fund. The Group acknowledged that the secretariat was on track with the activities in the management response plan related to the five-year evaluation, and requested that the secretariat provide a new update at the fall 2012 meeting.

5. Members acknowledged that resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators play a key role in the management of the Fund and called on the secretariat to support them and the humanitarian country teams in prioritizing activities and funding allocations, in particular by providing funds earlier in a response. The Advisory Group supported the recommendation of the three resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators that, as often as possible, independent cluster leads should be appointed to avoid conflicts of interest in the prioritization of funding. On

the transformative agenda, the members emphasized that a reasonable balance must be found, as the agenda was rolled out, between the empowerment of resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators and the extent to which they were held accountable. At the same time, the accountability of the agencies to the resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators for the use of CERF funds needed to be strengthened. Finally, the members of the Advisory Group also expressed support for the approach taken in allocating funds from the underfunded window in Ethiopia.

6. The Advisory Group acknowledged that improvements had been made in reporting by resident coordinators/humanitarian coordinators since their previous meeting, but more work was still required. The members requested that, once the analysis of the reporting for 2012 had been finalized, the information be shared with them. The Group also requested a more in-depth discussion of that issue at their next meeting and asked the secretariat of the Fund to continue to work closely with the United Nations agencies and IOM to ensure high quality reporting.

7. The members reviewed the first draft of the CERF risk assessment matrix. They suggested that the draft should be shared for comment with agencies and other stakeholders. The Group has asked the secretariat to return to the fall 2012 meeting with an updated version.

8. On the question of programme support costs, the Advisory Group discussed the overall programme support costs of 10 per cent (3 per cent retained at Headquarters for the management of the Fund and 7 per cent passed on to agencies), with particular emphasis on the issue of the informal 60/40 split — whereby 60 per cent of the portion retained at Headquarters is used by the Controller and 40 per cent is allotted to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the costs associated with the management of the Fund. The Group expressed concern regarding the justification for the split and the nature of the expenditures of the 60 per cent, and requested a review of the division of the programme support costs, and the use of the Controller's 60 per cent portion.

9. The Group requested the secretariat to ensure that the agencies members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee focus specifically on the Fund in evaluations of their work, or at least to ensure that the Fund is taken adequately into account when recipient agencies carry out relevant and related evaluations.

10. For the fall 2012 meeting, the Advisory Group requested the Fund secretariat to provide an update on the evaluation of the underfunded emergency window, and the outcome of the performance and accountability framework review of situations in the Philippines, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, and the refugee crisis in Côte d'Ivoire. The Advisory Group also intends to discuss the review of indicators in the performance and accountability framework.

11. The Advisory Group was encouraged by the feedback received from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on efforts to improve the speed of disbursements of funds to implementing partners and expressed their support for the improvements made so far. The Advisory Group asked the Fund secretariat to continue to closely monitor and report on timeliness data.

Administrative matters

12. During the meeting, the members of the Advisory Group selected Milton Rondo Filho (Brazil) as the Vice-Chair. The Advisory Group expressed their appreciation and thanks to the outgoing Vice-Chair, Silvano Langa (Mozambique) and the other board members who are completing their terms.

13. The next meeting of the CERF Advisory Group is to take place in Geneva in October 2012.